

A CHARGE
TO THE
CLERGY OF THE DIOCESE
OF
WESTERN NEW YORK,

Delivered August 15th, 1855, at the opening of the Convention
in Christ Church, Binghamton,

ON
THE AVENUES OF INFIDELITY.

BEING THE THIRD CHARGE.

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“And what concord hath CHRIST with Belial? Or what part hath he that believeth with an infidel?”

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THE CHARGE.

MY BRETHREN OF THE CLERGY:

“The visible Church of Christ is a congregation of faithful men, in which the pure word of God is preached, and the sacraments be duly ministered, according to Christ’s ordinance, in all those things that of necessity are requisite to the same.”*

This is the society which Christ established in the world. It has continued from him to the present time. The Protestant Episcopal Church is a lineal branch of the same, having the same ministry, faith, discipline and worship.

Of this branch, the Church in this Diocese is a portion, subject to its laws, entitled to its privileges, sharing in its prosperity, and exposed to its dangers.

The object of the existence of such a society is the maintenance and preservation of truth and holiness among its own members, and the dissemination of truth and holiness among those who are without, with a view to the ultimate salvation of them all.

The dangers of this society must arise from two sources:

The misconduct and errors of its own members;

The assaults of those who are without.

Assaults from without can come but in two forms;

* ART. XIX.

force and deception. Against force in the shape of persecution it is shielded by the arm of the law ; against deception it must protect itself.

It is the office of the ministry to watch against these dangers, to sound the needful alarm, and to provide the adequate resistance. To introduce and propagate skepticism and infidelity among its members, constitute one of the modes in which, in modern times, the stability of the Church is assailed.

Skepticism is to doubt the truth of christianity. Infidelity is to disbelieve it.

Outside of the Church to which we belong are two classes :

Those who reject christianity altogether, and those who receive the truth of our religion, but resist the claim of the Protestant Episcopal Church.

At present our concern is with the former. The Church is exposed to assaults, direct and indirect, from those who wholly deny the truth of God, and who seek to pervert those within the fold.

My design in this Charge is to point out to you, my brethren of the Clergy, SOME OF THE AVENUES OF INFIDELITY through which your flocks may be approached, that you may apply the necessary guards.

Fervently do I implore the blessing of God on this discussion !

I. The first avenue of infidelity to which I will call your attention, is that which is founded on distorted views of the Doctrine of Necessity, as held and taught by prominent advocates of the system.

There are two kinds of necessity advocated among men :

That which is asserted by atheists, who teach that all beings and events are the result of a necessity ; that they flow one from another, in a necessary chain, without any predisposing or overruling power ; thus denying both the existence and the need of any supreme being. This is the source not so much of infidelity as of atheism.

It is repudiated alike by the consciousness of man, and the revelation of God.

The other kind of necessity is that which is founded on the sovereignty of the Deity. Nothing can occur without God. His omnipotence places all beings and events at his disposal. All things occur by his permission or his procurement. Nothing can be said, thought or done without his previous knowledge, allowance, or act. Hence all in man is traceable back to God as its author ; the evil and the good are alike from him. Morality and religion are not more from him than immorality and irreligion. Christianity is a fiction. It is useful only as the law of the land is useful, and as it recognizes and adopts such principles and conduct as man's social relations demand for good. Its reference to the future is without authority. Its claim is no higher than that of other religions that have gone before, or exist around it. Hence its reception or rejection is matter of indifference, or at least of expediency. It speaks with no voice from God.

Under this necessity man is no free agent. He wills and does what he is made to will and do, whether in

conformity to God's law or against it. God is the Author of all. Man is not responsible. This is the infidel scheme of necessity.

But necessity is held as a doctrine by believers, who also trace back every thing to God as its author, but seek to reconcile necessity with free agency and free will.

Some say, "God controls the will but leaves the action free." But this explanation puts a shackle on the will, and there can obviously be no freedom where the will is under constraint. It is partial bondage to say the least. Beside, the will is the master faculty, and to control the will is to control the actions. If I will what is good, he that makes me will the good is the author of the good. If I will what is evil, he that controls the will is the author of the evil.

Some say, "God permits the evil that good may come of it, for wise and holy purposes." But this is the doctrine that the end sanctifies the means—a doctrine abhorrent to human morality, and which cannot be allowed in what is divine. It incorporates evil in the plan of the Divine proceedings.

Some say, in order to counteract the inference that if the future event be necessary it will happen whatever the individual may do, "that the event happens because that is done which will make it happen;" the instrumentality is as necessary as the event itself. But this explanation does not touch the freedom of the will; the question being not as to a necessary connection between the will and its consequents or actions, but between the will and its antecedents or motives. If the

will is not free as to its volitions, it is not a free will, however free it may be as to its effects or consequences.

Now this doctrine of "necessity" controlling the will and the actions of men, is the source of infidelity in this way. It is maintained by intellectual men. It is taught by philosophers. It is held by eminent christians. It is the foundation of deep systems of divinity. It has been cherished by multitudes of good men in all ages. It is maintained by some amongst ourselves.

With this doctrine on my mind, as an unbeliever, I argue thus: Whatever I think, will, or do, is of necessity. It occurs because it is fixed to occur. God decrees it—God effects it. He is omnipotent—I am nothing. Whether good or evil, I can neither help nor hinder. I think it because he controls my mind. I will it because he controls my will. I do it because he controls my actions. In no way then am I responsible for the thought, the will, or the act. The responsibility is with Him, not with me.

Now the Gospel holds me responsible; tells me I must abstain from some things and perform the very opposite; calls upon me for mental, moral and spiritual acts which I cannot accomplish unless God makes me perform them; and threatens me for doing what it is necessitated for me to do. The Gospel then is inconsistent with my moral constitution and position.

You attempt to reconcile the necessity of action with my responsibility. But your attempts fail. I discard your explanations; and standing on the broad fact that I am under the LAW OF NECESSITY, I doubt, I question,

I discard the doctrine of responsibility and the religion which teaches it.

So argues the infidel, and these arguments he urges among christians ; by these he seeks to unsettle, distract and decoy them from the truth of God, the revelation of Christ, and the pursuit of their salvation.

Three answers are given to this argument. Calvinists answer by saying that all things occur indeed of necessity—evil as well as good—sin as well as virtue ; but then, moral evil done by the power of God is not moral evil, because he does it for wise and holy ends.

Others allege, in answer, that moral evil or sin is done by the Almighty, not efficiently but permissively. He does not produce, He allows it. It occurs, but is controlled for ulterior good.

Others more truly answer, that moral evil or sin is not by the decree or appointment of God or by the permission of God, but arises from the NATURE OF MORAL AGENCY. Created moral agents must have the power of disobedience, or they are not moral agents. A moral agent is a being free to will and to do, or not to will and to do what is enjoined. Such agents God created ; such agents were angels ; such an agent was man. Angels disobeyed and fell ; man disobeyed and fell. God did not produce the fall in either case. The fall was foreseen by the Deity in both cases. In the case of man, who was tempted to disobedience by an anterior Being, the results of the fall were provided for. In the case of angels, as far as we know, no provision was made for their lapse.

The only question behind all this, so far as man is concerned, is whether it was more consistent with God's holiness and wisdom to create such a moral agent as man, with a power to disobey, and provide against his lapse ; than not to create any such moral agent at all.

We answer affirmatively ; because,

1. The creation and redemption of man brings out a point in the divine character—God's mercy—not before disclosed. Mercy is "love to the unworthy." The display of infinite mercy is the result of man's disobedience and ill deserts.

2. The scheme of redemption, into which holy angels desire to look, may be the means of retaining them in their allegiance and holiness.

3. Chiefly, man not being possessed of universal knowledge, is not competent to decide adversely upon this point ; which demands a knowledge of the universe and all its relations.

On the whole of this subject, then, lay down and keep before your flocks the undeniable truths of Scripture :

That sin is the transgression of the law of God.

That God is not the author or favorer of sin by production, permission, or connivance.

That man is a moral agent, and that moral agency implies, per se, in itself, the power of disobedience.

That a moral agent (angelic or human) has not been, and could not be, created without the power of disobedience.

That sin, obtruded on man by the temptation of the Devil, is provided against by the interposition of

the Son of God, who “was manifested that he might destroy the works of the Devil.”

That under the provisions of grace there exists no necessity of evil conduct in man, and no decree for his final condemnation irrespective of his character and conduct.

That sin or disobedience being voluntary, is rightly an object of abhorrence and punishment.

That man under the Gospel cannot be divested of responsibility to God, except by involuntary ignorance, incapacity, or idiocy.

And that by the Gospel, ample provision is made for the salvation of all that accept its offers, and submit to its terms.

On these plain principles you may repel the infidelity which seeks to subvert your flocks, by urging the doctrine of “necessity” as an excuse for sin, and would justify its views by the fact that christians themselves advocate and maintain the doctrine.

II. Another avenue of infidelity is a DISTORTED VIEW OF EDUCATION.

Education as applicable to man is right instruction and training in all duties and relations, with a view to physical, moral and eternal good. To keep his mind ignorant of his relations to the Deity, who is Creator, Redeemer and Sanctifier—from whom comes his body and his soul, who controls him on earth, is the Source to him of all that he enjoys, the refuge from all the evils that beset him, and the final arbiter of his future

weal or woe, is in plain contrariety alike to the nature of God and man.

With a soul and body, to confine education³ to the body is to leave the better part of man untaught.

As both earthly and immortal, a being for time and eternity, to leave out of his education all reference to the eternal, and expend all interest and labor on the temporal, is plainly to sacrifice the greater to the less.

The inner man consists of intelligence, affections, and will. Education is to enlighten the intelligence, to regulate the affections, and thus to guide the will aright.

In the Church of Christ, education must imply the implantation of the principles, the habits, the control and the influence of the religion of Jesus Christ. Grace, knowledge and holiness are its means and its end. Temporal interest and objects must be subservient to these. God, moral excellence, eternity, are the high and swaying motives to control both its object and its means.

The Church of Christ is the divine organization for the training of the soul and body, for the education of man. It brings him into covenant with God ; it provides for him grace ; it imparts to him instruction ; it surrounds him with moral and spiritual agencies, in sponsors and pastors ; it supplies him with means of grace and growth ; it sets before him high and holy motives ; it discloses his perils ; it provides the needed guards and succors ; it arms him for the conflict ; and it sets before him an ample and most animating prize to reward his achievements.

Now systems of education are prevalent among us which ignore the Deity, which ignore Christ, which ig-

nore the Holy Spirit, which ignore the Bible, and which ignore the Church of Christ.

Some contend that education and religion are wholly distinct, the one for this world, the other for the next ; that they should not be united ; that the Gospel should not be mixed up with reading, writing and arithmetic, nor with classics, mathematics and philosophy.

Some hold that as religion consists of morality, doctrines and sacraments, the first, morality, may be introduced into systems of public education, as it affects human relations and interests ; but that doctrines and sacraments should be excluded, as points to be settled between the Deity and the adult, not the child.

Some maintain that in the prevalent diversity of religious belief and practice, the child should not be trained to any mode of religion, but be left, when mature, to decide for himself, untrammelled and unprejudiced, which he should espouse, if any.

Some will urge that education is the mere training of a youth for a special object, as the mechanic for mechanism, the merchant for trade, the physician for medicine, the advocate for law, the farmer for agriculture, the divine for theology ; and therefore that it does not in all cases call for religious instruction, which should be left to private, personal and parental efforts.

Some proclaim that the very diversity of religions amongst us, and the diversity of religious systems among christians, preclude, or ought to preclude, religious teaching in schools, academies and colleges.

Some openly denounce a specific christian education as bigotry, intolerance and priestcraft.

Under such views, as you know, the Bible is often discarded from our schools ; God is not addressed in prayer ; Redemption by Christ the Saviour is never mentioned ; the grace of the Holy Ghost as an assistant agency of God no one ever hears of ; and divinely appointed ordinances of our holy faith are left entirely unexplained and untaught.

Amidst the prevalence of these views the young are brought up, and the mature amongst us live, imbibing distrust, skepticism and unbelief. They are not taught how or why such views should be repelled. They begin to doubt the systems under which they stand. Religious education imposes restraint. Religious education imposes duties irksome to indolence, self-will and self-indulgence. Religious education appears abstract, disconnected with immediate interests, presents far off motives and contingent results ; while the more worldly and less exacting systems accord with the indulgence, the ambition, the lust, and the indolence of the human soul. The one is the enemy, the other the ally of human corruption. Prominent men in literature, in politics, in philosophy, espouse the latter. The state adopts a defective system of necessity. Legislators sanction it in the senate and in public assemblies ; and the voice of the world approves and applauds it without reserve. Led on to question, to debate, to doubt, and to reject the necessity of a religious education, the same process aided by other influences begins to be applied to religion itself. Hostile agencies are ever ready to foster and strengthen the embryo evil, which soon develops

itself in neglect, indifference and sin, to the weakening, undermining, and ultimate overthrow of faith and holiness, and to the avowal, or at least the reception of unbelief.

Against all systems of education thus fostered and sustained, which shut out the Bible—which shut out God and Christ and the Holy Ghost, the Gospel and Church of Christ—you as Christ's ministers are unshrinkingly to array yourselves by solemn warning to your flocks.

As godly men, christian men, spiritual men, and churchmen, how can you consistently abandon the fundamental principles involved in each of these characters, or how can you hope, by such an abandonment, to save your people from the mistakes, the delusions, and ultimate evils to which they are on this subject so obviously exposed?

At the bottom of all training, intellectual, social, moral, and secular, pervading it throughout, must lie the recognition of God in Christ through the Holy Ghost, as disclosed in his Gospel and maintained in his Church. Education without this is unsafe, deceptive and perilous. Its progeny is infidelity.

III. DISTORTED VIEWS OF SOCIETY constitute a third avenue of infidelity.

Society is a divine appointment. Man was not created for solitary, but social existence. At his original being was the declaration, "it is not good for man to be alone." The three modes of social existence, as re-

recognized by Holy Scripture, are the domestic, the national, and the ecclesiastical. Into the home, the nation and the Church, all may be resolved.

Now the principles by which each of these can best be regulated are amply supplied by the religion of Christ. Peace, security, happiness, improvement, are provided for in regard to each. The Father is the Head of the family: the Ruler is the Head of the nation: Christ is the Head of the Church. Let the laws of God be brought to bear upon the interests, the government, and the object of any one of them, and its truest end will be accomplished. Faithfully applied, the principles of the Gospel will ameliorate and beatify all the relations of human life. Parents and children, governors and subjects, officers and citizens, find in the influence and provisions and injunctions of true religion, what is needful alike for their comfort, security and weal. The necessary ills of life would be diminished, and its highest advantages attained, by fidelity on the part of men to the injunctions of Christ. Especially and strikingly are these developed in the instructions of the Church: "My duty towards my neighbor
 "is to love him as myself, and to do unto all men as I
 "would they should do unto me: to love, honor, and
 "succor my father and mother: to honor and obey the
 "civil authority: to submit myself to all my governors,
 "teachers, spiritual pastors and masters: to order myself
 "lowly and reverently before all my betters: to
 "hurt nobody by word or deed: to be true and just in
 "all my dealings: to bear no malice nor hatred in my
 "heart: to keep my hands from picking and stealing,

“and my tongue from evil speaking, lying and slander-
 “ing: to keep my body in temperance, soberness and
 “chastity: not to covet nor desire other men’s goods:
 “but to learn and labor truly to get mine own living,
 “and to do my duty in that state of life unto which it
 “shall please God to call me.”*

But, as you know, men have not been satisfied with the divine provision for domestic, social, or ecclesiastical life. They seek to substitute their own wisdom for the divine laws. This has long been a characteristic of the human mind. Both in early times and of late, “men have sought out many inventions.”

Many of those systems by which we are now surrounded, are the avenues of infidelity, some secretly and some avowedly.

Thus *Owenism*, denying future accountability, alleging man to be the mere creature of circumstances, denouncing all religion as founded in prejudices and delusion, and seeking to reorganize society on the principles of a perfect equality, united labor, a uniform education, and a common sustenance, has run its course within the last half century.

Fourierism also has sought to modify and ameliorate the evils of society by new plans of association, the overthrow of existing distinctions of life, and the proposed enlargement of the sphere of the intellectual and social enjoyments.

And at this time *Mormonism*, originating within our own territorial limits, is urging its impious, unhallowed and sensual imposture, under the wing of riches, poli-

* CHURCH CATECHISM.

tics and power, not only in this country, but abroad.

In nearer approach to the truth, are other systems which seek to disconnect religion with man's earthly interests, relations and duties, to substitute other motives and influences than what she sanctions and urges, and to provide agencies of social benefit in lieu of what she appoints or commands. They create new ties ; they bind together by special and even secret engagements ; they hold out temporal advantages to sickness, adversity, and widowhood, to broken down fortune and the overburdened family. They set up new claims of interest, of right, of position, of education, of place, and of power. They avow novel principles, urge new measures, and press new reforms, on grounds and motives unsanctioned by the voice of religion or experience ; openly discarding the authority of both when urged against favorite projects of benevolence, or cherished measures of policy. Religion is pronounced defective as a medium of the needed reforms. Government is alleged to be too slow in its operations. The Church is denounced as inefficient. The existing evils, they allege, demand a bold and vigorous hand. New systems are to be introduced to provide for the body and the intellect ; to avert surrounding and impending evils ; to take the young and the old, men and women, childhood and manhood, under the wing of a new fledged agency of good, in the shape of fellowship, unions, and communities.

Now in all these plans and schemes of social reform, I cannot but see the seeds and elements of infidelity.

They create distrust of appointed plans of social good. They detach the mind from divine agencies for human benefit. They exaggerate the extent of evils to furnish a ground for their plans of relief. They throw odium upon the ordinary and approved means of grace and growth. They over-awe the timid by the boldness of their denunciation and avowals. The young, the inexperienced, the ignorant, and the unsettled, are lured away from "the old paths;" their faith is undermined; their stability totters; the newly urged project is first favored in thought, then countenanced by co-operation, and finally adopted in full. The ministry, the Church, the Gospel, the Bible, all sink before the new project of social improvement; and the once cordial and zealous christian becomes the bold discarder and denouncer of them all.

Here then is a source of moral and spiritual danger to your flocks. Infidelity enters through this avenue to weaken, pollute and destroy; and I earnestly and solemnly admonish you to guard yourselves and your flocks by timely warnings against its insidious approach.

Understand for yourselves, and impress upon them, that society exists as a divine appointment; that it must be regulated according to principles which God its author has disclosed; that composed of depraved beings evils in it must exist; that such evils are to be counteracted and amended according to the teaching of the Word of God; and that the religion of Jesus Christ is the appointed agency in its instruction, ministry, sacraments, ordinances, worship, morals and sanctions, for

the purity, stability, happiness, improvement and perpetuity of man's social life on earth, as it is for his salvation and glory in heaven.

The latest delusion that threatens your flocks is one, beginning within the limits of our own Diocese, but not in the Church, and originally called "spiritual rappings," now designated, as a system, by the name of *Spiritualism*, alleging an intercourse between the living and the dead, and claiming to derive from the spirits of the departed through living "mediums," a certain knowledge not only of earthly facts, but of the highest truths of religion, and the most imperative demands of duty.

The development of this system thus far presents such a body of anti-christian dogmas, and leads to such anti-scriptural and unholy practices, as constitute it a delusion, inexplicable as submitted to by an intelligent, sober and christian intellect, without referring to the possibility of "being given up to a reprobate mind."

The plain principle avowed by our Lord, and verified in the whole moral history of man, "a tree is to be known by its fruits," constitutes, and will ever constitute, for you in this matter the great "Counterfeit Detector" for this "spirit world."

There can be but two kinds of spirits, good and bad.

If, then, alleged visiters from the spirit world inculcate such doctrines as the eternity of matter, the natural purity of all men, their moral sufficiency without grace, doctrines repudiated by the Word of God; if they teach a denial of the divinity and atonement of the Son of God, of his resurrection and mighty power, of the truth, excellency and sufficiency of the Bible; if

they reject the existence of evil angels and their final punishment in hell ; if they deny the resurrection and the judgment, and the connection and responsibility of man with both ; if they urge the abolition of public worship, the marriage contract, the christian ministry and christian church, all of which have the sanction of an explicit revelation, based on sufficient evidence, resisting for eighteen centuries the assaults of infidelity ; then there is no resisting the conclusion that such a system, however it may have subdued some intelligent, pious, acute and honest minds, comes not from truth but from error—not from reality but from deception—not from God but from the Devil.

It is this logic of common sense, and of the Bible, this reasoning of Christ himself, that you are faithfully and fearlessly to apply to this matter for the composure of unsettled minds, and for the security of your flocks against this miserable and fatal delusion.

An obvious question of a practical nature here arises, in regard to the ecclesiastical treatment by a Pastor of such as have fallen under the power of these deceptions. What does fidelity to them, fidelity to the flock, fidelity to himself and fidelity to his Master exact ?

All demand that every effort should be made by instruction, counsel, remonstrance, prayer, argument and labors, “to hold up the weak, heal the sick, bind up the broken, bring again the outcast, and seek the lost.”

But when your faithful efforts have all failed, and the votary of inconsistent delusions resists them all by continued adherence to errors incompatible with the Gospel and Church of Christ, then are you required, as

entrusted with the Gospel, by fidelity to Christ and his Church, and on the self-protecting principle recognized by every society, to “minister discipline,” by dissevering his connection with the Church, and throwing the responsibility of fatal and soul-destroying error from yourselves and flocks, on the unhappy individual thus seduced from Christ ; remembering always to be “so merciful that you be not remiss, and so minister discipline that you forget not mercy.”

IV. DISTORTED VIEWS OF THE CHURCH OF CHRIST are another avenue of infidelity to which I ask your thoughts.

That the Church is a divine society ; that it was instituted by the Deity ; that it is composed on earth of men, women, and children, and in heaven of saints redeemed and ransomed unto God ; that the Church on earth holds the faith, sacraments, ministry and worship, prescribed by Christ ; that its object is to glorify God and save mankind ; that it is an appointed agent for moral and spiritual ends ; that its marks are unity, sanctity, truth, catholicity and apostolicity ; that the mode of admission and expulsion and the law of continuance are simple and obvious ; that here on earth it is, as composed of imperfect and fallible beings, liable to error, sin, disunion, parties and defects ; that it maintains authority over its members, and is possessed, in the Word of God, of an infallible standard of truth and duty ; that Christ is its head, and that its true and faithful members are hereafter to be united to Him in heaven, and to share, as the result of His benignant mediation, in the glory of the eternal world ; all these are

propositions to which that holy standard compels the submission of our minds.

Now distorted views of the Church, as leading to infidelity, exist in two directions :

In the first place, swerving from the original constitution of the Gospel in its ministry, has been set up a power claiming supremacy in the Church, disfiguring its worship by new and unauthorized objects of adoration, teaching doctrines inconsistent with its standard of truth and duty, and heterogeneously intermixing a temporal and secular with an unauthorized spiritual dominion, domineering over the consciences, judgments and lives of many, and avowing a sole and exclusive claim to the obedience of christian men as the vicegerent of God, displacing Christ from the headship of the Church on earth, and excluding all from alliance with him and from the hopes of heaven, who do not accede to its claims and acknowledge its authority. With plausible pretensions to unity, the pride of numbers, overwhelming power, enlarged resources, and appealing through error, to the most controlling influences over men as the dispenser of pardon to sinners and as holding the keys of heaven, it has exercised power immense over the consciences, judgments and interests of its members.

Maintaining “blasphemous fables and dangerous deceits,” and “practices plainly repugnant to the Word of God and the custom of the primitive Church,” and grievously erring “not only in their living and manner of ceremony, but also in matters of faith,”* there is pre-

* ARTICLES OF RELIGION.

sented in its corruption of practice, mutilation of truth, and perversion of principle, unfounded claims and overbearing influence debasing to mind and body, a system that has shaken the faith, consciences, and judgment of many, both without and within its circle.

Extravagant and unscriptural pretensions on the part of christians generate infidelity by an easy and natural process. They constitute a deception on the mind, and as soon as its enlarged knowledge and experience assure men of the error, and that they have been deceived, they doubt, dispute, and discard the whole system with which it was connected. Hence the prevalent opinion that under the outward conformities of the Roman Catholic system, runs a deep and wide current of skepticism and infidelity.

The danger arises the moment we pass the bounds of scriptural truth in presenting the claims of the Church. Up the limit of the Divine exaction in regard to it we must go, or we are unfaithful to God. We step beyond it at an obvious hazard of injury to ourselves and to others. Overstated truth is positive error. The reaction produces the opposite extreme. Where questions touch our relations to the Deity, the mind when aroused is peculiarly sensitive. It regards christian truth on any subject as a divine exaction or teaching. If the agents or ministers of such instruction are found deceptive in one point, the discovery throws a cloud over other points; unsettles, embarrasses, disturbs; and the process is from hesitation and uncertainty, to skepticism; and from skepticism to secret or open infidelity.

Let us be careful then not to push in regard to the Church her holy claims beyond the rock of scriptural truth. "Other foundation can no man lay than that is laid, which is Jesus Christ." On Him the Church is built. Divine in its order, ministry, doctrines and worship, let these be always based, moulded, argued, maintained and defended, according to His divine standard of truth. Let there be

No elevation of unrestrained church authority over, or on a par with, the written word :

No enjoined alliance of temporal with spiritual power:

No supremacy of one Bishop over all other Bishops and over the whole Church :

No claim of priestly power to absolute forgiveness of sin :

No development of new doctrines unknown to the Gospel and unrecognized in the Creeds :

No substitution of created beings as objects of the worship due only to the uncreated Deity.

Out of such and such like errors, when seen by the mind to be such, have sprung that distrust, skepticism, and infidelity, which so often have deformed the Church, saddened the ministers of truth, and arrested the salvation of men.

But distorted views of the Church exist also in the opposite direction, as a prolific fountain of unbelief.

The divisions of Protestantism are a fountain of infidelity, no less than a plausible and favorite weapon of Romish error against the truth.

That distorted views of the Church are, among Protestants, the great fountain head of division, is shewn

by the fact that no form of error arises and takes permanency without an immediate church organization to sustain it. Hence the list of independent Protestant church organizations has run up to the number of forty-one. Hence almost every leading denomination in our land has been subdivided into distinct and independent church organizations. Hence such organizations exist among us under the name of churches founded on variations of doctrine, order, ministry, worship, and sacraments. Hence a slight diversity of sentiment, on any of these points, produces often A NEW CHURCH. Hence church organizations are founded on popular leadership, political ambition, and partisan feeling. Hence attempted unions of these bodies have resulted in distractions, and further alienation. Hence there is a constant multiplication of so called Churches amongst us. Hence in my short ministerial life of thirty-five years, I can enumerate at least twelve new so called christian churches, independent of each other, each claiming to be acknowledged as the true Church of Christ, which did not exist when I was ordained to the ministry. Hence within a century past there have sprung up thirty at least new so called churches, each claiming to be the true Church of Christ. Hence the claim set up by some that every new convert to Christ must settle for himself, independently of authority or evidence, according to his feelings, whether man, woman, girl, or boy, what and where the Church is, which of the several organizations round him constitutes the true Church ; and that if the claims of none can be

sustained to his individual satisfaction, he becomes “the Church” himself.

Now all this, as I think, arises from distorted views of the Church ; which have been productive of sundry evils, leading some pious minds to cover up the difficulty, by urging and maintaining that the Church consists only of true converts invisible to human eyes, in the face of our Lord’s declaration that the Gospel net contains fishes good and bad, that the wheat and the tares grow together until the harvest, and that not until the end of the world shall the commissioned angels go forth to “gather out of his kingdom every thing that offendeth ;” others to make agreement in doctrine the bond of church unity ; and others to fly off to the plausible unity of Rome : and inducing some not only to deny the claims of all to be true churches, but to doubt and discard the very Gospel on which they all profess to be founded.

I presume there are but few amongst us who have not met with persons whose views have been turned against religion on this ground—the antagonistic and conflicting claims of so many distinct bodies to be the true Church of Christ. It may doubtless be a mere subterfuge in some : but when honestly urged ; when the sad grounds for this objection to the Gospel are so obviously before the eye ; when we advert to the working of our own minds on this subject ; when we ask ourselves if this discarded unity was not an original characteristic of christianity, openly avowed and urged in the Gospel, we are bound to regard it as a

substantial difficulty, and to be prepared to meet it.

We may answer it in two ways :

First, by alleging that the existence of fictitious churches does not prove the non-existence of a true Church, nor the existence of false religions prove the non-existence of a true religion. One may be true though many may be false, just as all coins are not false because there are many counterfeits ; and the very existence of false coin evinces that there must be true coin, of which they are the counterfeits.

We answer again, that the true Church CAN ALWAYS BE IDENTIFIED ; and therefore the existence of so many making claims to be such, does neither prove that none are true, nor that the Gospel should be denied because of these multitudinous and conflicting claims.

Set before your flocks the great principles of truth upon this topic.

Our Father in Heaven has sent his Son to the earth with a divine message, and with ample credentials to sustain his claims, disclosing and offering salvation. That divine Redeemer called his apostles around him, instituted a Church and its ministry, assured them of the perpetual continuance of his Church thus established, and thus compels us to test all conflicting claims to be his Church by the plain question of IDENTITY.

What church among the claimants is in direct and traceable connection with the Church to which he gave the ministry, doctrines, worship, sacraments, and new testament ; for that must be the true Church.

On this ground, as on a rock, our Church stands.

We claim identity with the apostolic and primitive Church by a clear and traceable connection with it. Our train is on the track. From this rampart the exclusive claims of Rome and mere modern pretensions are to be repelled on one side, and a plausible infidelity on the other.

It is a reasonable and sufficient answer to the former to allege the fact, that we have the ministry, the creeds, the sacraments, the worship, and the Scriptures of apostolic and primitive times, and are in continuous succession a part of the "One Holy, Catholic, and Apostolic Church."

To the infidel we adduce the same great fact, of the existence of a true Church, and true Gospel, amidst the prevailing diversities of religions and churches, to rebut his hasty conclusion that none is true because many are false.

So long as adherence to the Church is fidelity to truth and fact, and to its divine Head, you may safely disregard the charges of bigotry, exclusiveness, arrogance and formality, as well as the proposals of union and compromise and co-action, by which we are more or less assailed.

The Gospel of Christ has never existed without the Church of Christ; and let us ever, each one of us, be able to say, "I am not ashamed of the Gospel of Christ," in its doctrines, sacraments, institutions and ministry, "for it is the power of God unto salvation."

With Hooker we proclaim: "Let us not fear herein "to be bold and peremptory, that if any thing in the

“Church’s government, surely the institution of Bishops, was from Heaven, was even of God : the Holy Ghost was the Author of it.”*

V. Another avenue of infidelity is A DISTORTED VIEW OF THE REQUISITES OF CHRISTIAN CHARACTER, in the inconsistent maintenance of an impenitent and worldly heart and life, by those who have been baptised into Christ.

That this is the spiritual condition of many in the visible Church, it would be absurd to deny. “All are not Israel who are of Israel,” is an avowal of inspiration itself, most fully verified by observation and experience. In the midst of the Church, in this day, there is “an evil heart of unbelief,” as there was in the days of Moses and of St. Paul.

We must admit that impenitence, carelessness and sin, characterise a large proportion of the visible flock of Christ. Not only the corruption of nature, but the overpowering influence of secular life, what the apostle calls “the lust of the flesh, the lust of the eye, and the pride of life,” keeps back multitudes from that avowal of faith, and that holy life, which Christ imposes, and which their connection with the Gospel implies and demands.

This inconsistency between their character and life, and the character and life which the Gospel requires, is perceived, felt, and often acknowledged by themselves. It is a fact of which they are fully conscious. As baptised persons, members of the society of God,

* ECCL. POLITY, VII. 5-10.

in a formal covenant with Him, solemnly pledged to a life of conformity to the Divine will, having in baptism "put on Christ," they are bound to a state of heart and life such as He prescribes ; while in fact they are living, openly and knowingly, in contrariety to His will and commands, and to their own solemn engagements of duty. They are careless, delinquent, procrastinating, partial in their services, readily sacrificing religious duties to indolence, pleasure, ambition, or the world ; or they are openly carnal, profane, and worldly, supremely devoted in soul and body to what they know God requires them to abandon wholly, or to make subordinate to His laws and to their own moral and spiritual welfare.

Now with full consciousness of this state of mind on their part, it is easy to perceive that such persons are in no condition to resist the insidious approaches of infidelity ; and in reality have a reason for wishing the Gospel were not true, and thus to silence its condemnatory voice. They have a faith in it, but it is cold, inoperative, uncontrolling, lifeless. When intimations, suggestions, or questions, adverse to christianity are presented to their minds, they listen, entertain, and cherish them. A firm conviction of the truth of the Gospel, as entertained by the stable and consistent christian, would repel them at once. His mind is convinced, his heart is right, his life consistent. For him no reason exists that he should wish the Gospel and its fearful threats against sin untrue. But it is not so with the impenitent and inconsistent christian. His mind is undecided. He is open to doubts. His faith is weak. The con-

sciousness of guilt is an enemy within the fortress. Present the suggestions of infidelity to a profane, carnal, ambitious, worldly, covetous, deceitful, over-reaching, hard-hearted man, and his character, so utterly condemned and denounced by the Gospel, supplies a cogent argument to dispose him to their reception. Infidelity offers a shield against the arrow of truth piercing and wounding his conscience. Licentiousness, profligacy, pride and blasphemy, are often the parents of unbelief.

An unsanctified man may believe in christinnity, because the argument in its behalf is such as to convince his understanding, and forbid him to doubt its truth or obligation. In such a case, his sins and errors harrass and disturb his conscience, but they do not unsettle his belief. Or the lingering influences of early instruction may ensure a long continued theoretical belief. But many an unsanctified man has never studied the evidences of christianity, nor been early trained in its belief; and though an acknowledged adherent, is so, more from association, education, domestic influences, and a loose and careless acquiescence, than from deliberate conviction. Such is the condition of many in our flocks.

Now such a man will be easily led to grasp at objections made by infidelity to the Gospel, and has in his mind no clear and solid convictions to set up against them. The proffered relief to his conscience is readily seized. Its fallacious arguments and insidious objections are not only not repelled, but find an ally within him, in a conscience seeking to escape from the con-

demnation of his sins, a heart alienated from the good which christainity imposes, and a life foreign to the holiness and graces which he knows ought to adorn his character, but which are not found in his possession.

Hence the very first step towards infidelity is disobedience to God ; a contrariety of character to his requirements ; a neglect of duties enjoined by him ; a violation of the moral and religious pledges imposed upon our consciences. Hence infidelity prevails most in that class who are living in open or heedless neglect of christain duty and obligation. Hence its attempts to entrap and delude are usually made among the careless, worldly, profane, and negligent. Hence new schemes of faith find their readiest abettors in this class of our flocks. Hence the most preposterous and absurd pretensions in religion are so often excused, defended and justified, as efforts to reach truth, or escapes from enthralled opinion, or overthrows of prejudice and bigotry. Hence the long-fixed institutions and usages of the Gospel, its sanctuaries, its public worship, its observance of the Lord's day, its sacraments, ordinances, and ministry, when assailed by infidelity or error, are upheld by many amongst us with feeble defences, doubting minds, infirm argument, and trembling tongues. Though baptised in the name of Christ, they are living in conscious disregard of the character and life which Christ prescribes. They lack the boldness of consistency.

Now infidelity finds here an excuse, a cover, a shield in this "evil heart of unbelief," which soon advances

from protection to friendship, from careless countenance to practical adoption, from secret reception of error to open and bold avowal.

It must be admitted that this state of mind in some of our flocks arises from an erroneous estimate of their true relations to God, early imbibed, and fostered by prevailing views and teaching. They have espoused the conviction, that no man is bound to be a believer, an advocate of the Gospel, an open avower of belief in its truth, until he has gone through a defined process of conversion, and made a public profession of religion; that anterior to such an event in his life, he is not much, if at all, in advance of actual infidelity; that the obligation of a holy character, of obedience to Christ, of conformity to divine laws and institutions, does not yet rest on his conscience; that he is not yet under grace; and that being without religion in his heart, he is not bound to conform to its requirements, or to vindicate its truth or claims.

In others, it arises from the inward and outward temptations which constantly assail the mind, and constitute a part of probation to which all are subject. It is fostered by the evil influence of the unseen foe, whose guile and power are, in the mysterious workings of Providence, exerted for our ruin.

But from whatever fountain it may flow, what does this peril to your flocks exact of you but the most faithful, diligent, and unremitted efforts to proclaim and enforce the truth; to startle the negligent, careless, and inconsistent from their perilous condition; and to resist the approaches of infidelity, by erecting against

it the solid ramparts of Gospel truth and character? Enforce upon your flocks that these inconsistencies are doubly injurious—fatal to their own eternal hopes, and perilous as opening a door to the ravages of infidelity on themselves, their families, and their brethren. Impress them with the fact, so distinctly asserted in holy Scripture, that “as many as have been baptised into Christ, have put on Christ;” that their not having made a formal religious profession exempts them from no one duty or obligation they have assumed; that lukewarmness is a most hazardous condition of the soul; that they are not to wait until God converts them, but at once “to gird up the loins of their minds,” and “give all diligence to make their calling and election sure.” You have the example of St. Paul to stir you to fidelity, in invoking all who are of the fold to put on the appropriate character, and maintain a consistent and holy life. “For the grace of God that bringeth salvation hath appeared unto all men, teaching us, that denying ungodliness and wordly lusts, we should live soberly, righteously and godly in this present world; looking for that blessed hope, and the glorious appearing of the Great God and our Saviour Jesus Christ, who gave himself for us that he might redeem us from all iniquity, and purify unto himself a peculiar people zealous of good works.”*

Seek, then, to close up this avenue of infidelity, by not only presenting to your flocks the evidences of christianity in the instructions of the pulpit, in formal lectures, and by the dissemination of appropriate tracts

* TITUS II., 11—14.

and volumes, but by faithfully enforcing upon all the flock the faithful and consistent exhibition of the christian character and life. The early apologies of the Fathers attest that the Church has had this conflict with infidelity from the earliest ages. And when to the abstract arguments for the Gospel, your flocks shall add the power of a consistent christian life, the desolating enemy may be easily averted, or triumphantly defied.

VI. The last avenue of infidelity to the christian flock that I shall name, is that which arises from the Pastors themselves, their defects, inconsistencies, and sins, A DISTORTED MINISTERIAL CHARACTER.

When the ministry belie the Gospel by unholy lives and conversation, evincing that they preach doctrines which they do not believe, enforce virtues which they do not practice, and avow principles which exert no influence on themselves, the disclosure of such inconsistencies is an open stumbling block in the path of the Gospel, repels the honest enquirer after truth, and supplies ground for the conclusion that the Gospel itself, which thus seems to fail to control the ministry who profess to believe and obey it, cannot be a system of truth, but like false religions, is the refuge of hypocrites, fanatics and dupes.

It will be admitted that in honesty an enquirer should not be swayed by such a view, for the adverse conclusion is aside from the merits, and is based, not upon the Gospel, but upon a perversion of it.

But that some minds are thus influenced against the

truth, we may not deny. Ministerial unfaithfulness is a door of unbelief. As the blood of the martyrs is the seed of the Church, so the sins of its ministers are its blight and desolation. This is a statement which needs neither proof nor illustration to enforce it upon your minds.

Fidelity and consistency may be urged upon you on other grounds, of most weighty and affecting influence, not now necessary to be pressed.

What I wish at present to enforce, is the sad result of ministerial dereliction on the minds of your flocks, as regards their conviction of the truth of the Gospel; to speak in affectionate warning, exhortation and counsel, in this aspect of the subject.

My brethren of the Clergy, the Gospel demands an appropriate character and life in its ministers. Such character and life are enjoined by direct command. They are enforced by divine and apostolic example. They are urged as an appointed means of influence for good. They are in harmony with ministerial profession. And they are regarded as evidence of the truth of the system committed to the ministry.

An indevout, unholy, worldly, carnal, corrupt, impenitent and faithless ministerial character, is proscribed by christianity; whilst a contrary character of devotion, sanctity, heavenly-mindedness, spirituality, purity, penitence and fidelity, is enjoined. The exhibition of the latter confirms the truth of our instructions; the exhibition of the former belies what we proclaim, and engenders disbelief of its truth.

The faith of our flocks is thus to some extent fastened to our characters and lives.

In closing up the avenues of infidelity, then, for the protection of your flocks, it is needful that you look to yourselves, in the maintenance of a character appropriate to your position as the heralds of salvation. To a verified commission, sound doctrine, and adequate learning, must be annexed a devout and earnest mind, a holy life, and unsparing devotion of soul and body to the work. All personal, domestic, social and secular relations, must succumb to that "office and ministration in the Church of God," which, we trust, you have been inwardly moved by the Holy Ghost to take upon your souls. To the overwhelming motives which prompt us to fidelity, devotion and zeal, annex the fearful thought that a relapse into sin may not only shut out others from the fold, but sap the foundation of belief in the minds of those within its limits, drive the sheep into the wilderness, and bring everlasting destruction on yourselves and them. While on the other hand, an example of ministerial fidelity will help to rivet divine truth on the minds of your flocks, ensure to yourselves the promised crown of glory, and make both you and them "meet to be partakers of the inheritance of the saints in light."

In concluding this exposition of some of the avenues through which infidelity may approach your flocks, let me urge you faithfully to present the great truths that I have thus imperfectly unfolded:

That no "law of necessity" constrains us into sin here on earth, nor into perdition in a future world:

That true education can never ignore God and Christ and the Holy Ghost, the scriptures of eternal truth, nor the blessed Gospel which came down from Heaven for the improvement, guidance and salvation of men :

That social existence on earth can be well and rightly regulated only by the revealed disclosures and rules of Him who ordained and enjoined it for man :

That the church and ministry, in the form in which Christ established them, must be binding on all his followers empowered to identify and to adopt them, until he shall release them from the obligation :

That godliness in your flocks is one of the best shields you can urge them to adopt against the inroads of delusion and unbelief :

And that ministerial fidelity and holiness on your part, will constitute a grand conservative of truth.

Let both clergy and laity fully and faithfully espouse, maintain, and act upon those truths, and you will thereby, with God's blessing, erect against the intrusion of infidelity and error, an effectual rampart ; and secure the final benediction of Him who hath said "blessed are those servants whom the Lord when he cometh, shall find WATCHING."

My brethren, of the clergy, the CHRISTIAN REVELATION, which we proclaim and guard, is the disclosure of God's will to man through Christ.

It is POSSIBLE, because God, the Creator, is omnipotent to make it; and man, the creature, is intelligent to receive it.

It is PROBABLE, because God is the loving Father to

provide it, and man is the sinful and erring child to need it.

It is DEMONSTRABLE, because God, its Author, can present the proofs, and man, the recipient, can entertain and weigh them.

It is TRUE, because its facts and statements accord with God's character as disclosed in His works and with man's nature, necessities, hopes and interests, as disclosed in his history ; and are sustained by evidence founded on history, prophecy and miracles—testimony direct and indirect, open, public, accessible, that for eighteen centuries has stood the shock of assault and scrutiny in every age, gathering strength in its progress, defying the subtlety of error, and commanding the faith of the acutest and noblest intellects.

Its FOUNDATION, is in the New Testament.

Its SUBSTANCE, is in the creeds of the Church.

Its APPOINTED MEDIUM is the the Church of the living God.

And we, ITS ADVOCATES AND AGENTS, are the commissioned ministry, laboring in the power of the Holy Ghost, and under the great Captain of our salvation, the Lord Jesus Christ, its author on earth, and its finisher in Heaven.

Fidelity here will be glory there.

